ACTING AS A CONSULTANT
TO PARISHES SEEKING A RECTOR

For almost a year I have been acting as a consultant for parishes seeking a rector. To date this has involved a total of nine, with additional ones in the negotiations stage. It began last summer when I received a telephone call from the Rev. Henry W. Sherrill, then Rector of the Church of the Redeemer in Cincinnati, Ohio, who had resigned to become Executive Officer of the Diocese of Southern Ohio. Mr. Sherrill said he believed a consultant was needed whose task would be:

1. To encourage and assist the lay leaders to study and evaluate the situation of the Parish, setting immediate and long-range goals.
2. On the basis of such evaluation, to establish criteria for the new rector.
3. To assist in the screening process of potential candidates.

Subsequently, Mr. Sherrill stated his reason for reaching the unique conclusion that a consultant was desirable. He writes:

"1. Experience has taught me the helpless position in which our laity found themselves when confronting the responsibility of selecting a new rector. This vulnerability stemmed seemingly from these factors:
   a. Weak and distorted criteria for evaluating the role of rector.
   b. Difficulty in establishing the function and purpose of their parish.

c. No church machinery for providing them with information about the availability or competence of potential candidates.
d. The inability of the diocesan bishop, bunted by tradition and role, to do more than provide a general list and broad advice.

2. My resignation as Rector of the Church of the Redeemer, sharpened my concern. Many times, at great expense to them and to their congregations, vestry men of other parishes had groped their way by me and others in their search for a new leader. It was painful to watch and even more painful to contemplate my former colleagues repeating the same process.

3. The answer pointed in the direction of a consultant. By training and experience in their own fields, the Vestry of the Redeemer was experienced in the use of consultants. They understood the role, the purpose, the use, the expense, and the value of professional consultation. Together the Vestry and I had made wide and effective use of a variety of consultants. It seemed a natural choice.

4. Who was the consultant to be? In a telephone conversation with the Rev. Reuel L. Howe, D.D., both a teacher and a consultant to me and to the parish, the qualifications were reviewed:
   a. The consultant must understand and be capable of fulfilling the role.
   b. The consultant must be prepared to ask for and expect a fee for his services.
   c. The consultant must have an extensive personal knowledge of bishops and clergy on a national basis.
   d. The consultant must have or acquire knowledge of the parish served. Criteria for rector and parish needed careful development.
   e. The consultant must possess sufficient time and flexibility in his schedule to permit such a function.
   f. While few clergy in our judgment met such requirements, there were three or four, on the basis of our experience, we thought we could recommend! Such were presented to the Vestry along with guidelines for reporting to Bishop Blanchard and to the congregation."

I told Mr. Sherrill that I possessed no experience in such professional consultation, but I did not know of anyone who did possess such experience. On the other hand, I expressed

interest expecially in view of my recent resignation as Executive Director of the Church Society for College Work. I remarked that I was sure that consultation of the kind envisioned, to be effective, should be undertaken on a paid basis, to which he readily agreed saying that was what he had in mind. He told me he had thought of my doing this because of my wide acquaintance with clergy and Bishops throughout the Church.

In due course, I was visited in Cambridge by Mr. John Hanley, a member of the Selection Committee. We discussed the general approach to the problem along the lines mentioned by Mr. Sherrill with general agreement on the procedure to be followed. On compensation we agreed to my receiving travel and other out-of-pocket expenses plus $100 per day for actual time spent either in consultation in Cincinnati or in doing my "home work". The arrangements, of course, were subject to the approval of the Vestry and their decision to ask me to undertake the consultation. Within a week or two I received a phone call asking me to come to Cincinnati to meet with the Committee and the Vestry.

In my first meetings I stressed that as far as I knew we were breaking new ground together, but that if the consultation arrangement worked out successfully, it might be of value to the entire Church as a viable approach to the difficult problem of how a vestry proceeds to fill the vacancy when

the rector resigns. I freely admitted that I had no particular expertise but had given the matter considerable thought and had the experience as a laymen of serving on a vestry committee charged with responsibility of securing a rector for a large parish and also had some fourteen years experience an an ordained clergyman.

Prior to my first meeting with the Committee, suggested criteria had been drawn up by a sub-committee stating the personal qualifications of candidates as well as the "philosophy" of the Parish. Much time was consumed in the first meetings with the Committee and subsequently with the Vestry in refining and sharpening the qualifications and philosophy and particularly the mission of the Parish. Subsequently a Vestry survey was conducted by mail on "Objectives of the Church of the Redeemer". Consideration was given to involving as many parishioners as possible in the survey but this was deemed impractical because summer is not a propitious time to hold meetings. However, many of the leaders of the Parish, other than Vestry members, were involved.

During the first weekend of meetings with the Committee, Vestry, and individuals, considerable discussion ensued as to the relative emphasis to be placed on the various functions of a rector, i.e., preaching, pastoral, prophetic, teaching, and administration with no absolute consensus

reached during my first visit or during a second weekend of meetings. However, in the process of discussion, there was sufficient airing of views so that a wider understanding of the mission of the Parish and the duties of clergy leadership was achieved. In this connection a study of how the rector had spent his time on a yearly basis was prepared.

After two weekends of meetings, the screening process was begun. This was undertaken by first recording data from The Clerical Directory on a single sheet in readable form. Next the potential candidates were broken down into as many categories as possible including the geographical area in which they now resided and areas where they had previously been located, as well as their seminary affiliation and any other categories which could be developed from the data. Each category would include from three to a dozen names from a total list of about seventy with, of course, most names appearing in two or more categories. With such lists before me, I began telephoning people in various parts of the country who might be expected to know most of the men on a given list and whose judgement I trusted. I told them precisely what I was doing, including the name of the parish and the criteria developed for a new rector, asking them to tell me in confidence which man or men on the list under consideration best met the specified qualifications. I stressed that I was not seeking negative but positive

information. The telephoning took considerable time, but I believe it was more productive than letters of recommendation, in which I have little confidence. It was soon apparent how rapidly certain men came to the top of the list. Prior to the final development of the lists, two rather arbitrary factors were used to reduce the number of possible candidates: men well outside the age limits specified were eliminated as well as men who had only occupied their present posts for less than three years.

While the main list from which I initially worked was the one given me by the parish, I soon received names of men whom my telephone contacts would mention as possessing many of the qualities set forth in the criteria. After having worked now with nine parishes, I have data on a rather extensive list of clergy which permits me to add names to any list developed by a parish seeking always to match the profile of the parish with the profile of the man. This is not done on the basis of maintaining any status quo, but rather to seek a man who will work with the laity in furthering their objectives to fulfill as best they can the mission of the church in their community and diocese.

In screening at least two checks were made on each man, usually three, and on the names emerging at the top, four or more. After studying the results obtained from my phone

check, I submitted a list of six potential candidates to the Committee with the recommendation that these men be visited and screened as carefully as possible by the Committee using all avenues open to them to double check on the suitability of the man for the parish and vice versa.

In order to facilitate visitations, I telephoned each potential candidate telling him exactly the situation--that he was one of six men under consideration by the Church of the Redeemer in Cincinnati, how I had functioned, and asking if he would be willing to talk to a delegation and, if so, when was he scheduled to preach. It was made absolutely clear that no obligation was involved on his part or the Committee's at this preliminary stage. Two of the six men removed themselves from consideration, one because he would not consider a present move under any circumstances, and the other because he had another position under consideration which he subsequently accepted before the scheduled visitation took place. In the other four contacts, a visitation was arranged including an opportunity on Saturday for a relaxed conversation with the man, his wife, and the delegation.

Each delegation reported back to the Committee and on the basis of such reports all four men were asked to visit the parish during the week for two days accompanied by their wives with expenses paid. One declined, not because of the procedure, but because subsequent developments in his

situation dictated that he remove his name from consideration. It was made clear all around that visits to and from did not obligate either the parish or the clergyman, but provided a basis for more mutual exposure for the benefit of all concerned.

In passing I would like to emphasize that I hold no brief for the validity of this procedure. Some clergymen would be unwilling to visit a parish without an actual "call" in their pockets. On the other hand, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a calling committee or a vestry to evaluate properly a man only by hearing him preach and during an hour's conversation. Likewise, it is hardly feasible for an entire vestry to travel around the country week after week, to say nothing of taking the time of the clergy involved in such a process. Furthermore, it seems desirable for a man to see a parish in order to evaluate his suitability in a particular place. Such procedure as described above seeks to make the best of what is an awkward, if not archaic, system.

My final meetings with the Committee took place when I was asked to sit in as a resource person to give information as requested on the candidates under final consideration. At no time did I rank the potential candidates nor did I in any way seek to direct a choice. My main function was to give information and to advise on procedural matters. The Committee made a recommendation which after careful debate the Vestry approved. A call was issued and was accepted.

The final result seems to be a happy one for all concerned, but in the actual final choice I accept neither credit nor blame for the eventual outcome.

At all points in my work as a consultant to a parish seeking a rector, I have kept the Bishop informed. This initially involved seeking his permission to my acting as consultant, as well as seeing to it that the pertinent canons were observed by the Vestry in gaining his approval as required.

Since my first engagement as a consultant, I have been retained to date by eight other parishes in five other dioceses. There are variants in every situation. In one instance I was retained after the Committee and Vestry had spent several months developing an extensive list and making several visitations. In this case it was not deemed feasible to conduct a parishwide evaluative study. Nevertheless, careful thought was given to the immediate and long-range goals and objectives of the parish resulting in the development of precise and appropriate criteria for the new rector. Following the previously described screening process, the names of seven men were submitted, two of whom withdrew from consideration. The others were visited and three men asked to make a visit to see the parish and meet with vestry members and other parishioners. One of the men was called and has accepted.

In another situation a very well-planned self study was undertaken with the entire communicant list invited to attend one of two scheduled evening meetings out of which an evaluation of the parish was made and criteria for the new rector established. This time the names of eight men were submitted, none of whom removed themselves from consideration. Only five were visited because among these there proved to be such likely candidates that it was not necessary to visit all on the list. An able assistant in the parish, who was excluded from my final list of recommendations on the basis of age limits set up in the criteria, was called and has accepted.

In another parish it became clear early in the process that most of the members of the vestry wished to call a former assistant to be rector. In this instance, my main role was to assist in evaluating the parish as well as to advise on procedural matters. Whereas considerable screening was undertaken, it was not as extensive as in other situations, but was sufficient, I believe, to assure the Committee and Vestry that they had acted responsibly and also to give assurance to the man called that he had been chosen after numerous other clergy had been evaluated for the specific parish.

Summarizing the present status of my consultations; four of mine have called a man who has accepted; one is

about at the point of issuing a call; and the others are in various stages of the process. (I should also say that I have acted as a consultant for a diocese on matters of planning and another in making a study and report on the ministry of the diocese within its colleges and universities.)

In reflecting on my work as consultant to parishes seeking a rector, there are several points and comments which seem appropriate to make:

1. First and most important it is very clear to me and I try to make it equally clear to the committees and vestries involved that the parish is my client. I work for the parish and what I believe to be its best interests. I am not seeking to find a position for any one clergyman nor, in a consultative capacity, would I undertake to seek to find a clergyman a position.
2. The process of self-study and planning in a parish is very important and should be built in as a continuing procedure. In this connection the M.R.I. Packet (Installment #2) entitled "Self-Evaluation and Planning in the Parish" is quite helpful and has been commended by me to all the parishes except the first one.
3. It is essential to understand that the consultant does not select the rector. Several possible candidates who best meet the criteria are suggested,

at which point the consultant withdraws from the scene. The choice is the vestry's, not the consultant's.

4. The experience of serving as a consultant brings a certain objectivity to the task of advice and consultation which is hardly possible for someone who is closely involved in the situation and has a personal stake in the outcome.

5. My consultations have been with parishes having a communicant range from about 500 to 1,500. I would hope that smaller parishes might find consultative services equally valuable, possibly requiring less time, resulting in a lower fee.

6. As a matter of record, it should be stated that total charges on the parishes billed to date have ranged from $626.10 to $1,301.54; the consulting time spent ranging from 5 days to 9½ days. (Some current consultations may run higher because of larger travel expenses.)

7. It seems in order to comment on the predicament faced by laymen when they are asked to serve on a committee to select a rector. The system is such that little reliable information is available on candidates, and, from a clergyman's standpoint, it depends on whom he knows if he is to have an opportunity to be considered for available openings.

8. A major question in our whole system of clergy placement is this: What is a man to do if he

decides it is time for him to move, both in the interests of the parish as well as in his own interests? The present system does not provide a satisfactory procedure.

9. When I undertook my first consultation, it was admittedly experimental, but it has now developed beyond that stage and has been proven to be a helpful and viable procedure. As further experience is gained, refinements will be added, but is is clear that the basic idea is sound given the present system of clergy deployment.

10. To any parish representatives or Bishops who wish to have them, names are available for reference purposes of men and women who have served on Committees where I have acted as consultant.

The Rev. Jones B. Shannon, D.D.
1933 Main Road
Westport Point, Mass. 02791
Telephone 617 636-2918

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